

MERCHANDISE DISPLAY HOOK

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

5 This application claims priority from United States provisional application serial number 60/493,211 filed August 6, 2003; the disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 1. TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates generally to merchandise display hooks that support items of merchandise for review by potential customers. These display hooks are designed to be cantilevered from a support structure such as a display board or a display rack. More particularly, the present invention relates to such display hooks that either prevent the rapid removal of items of merchandise from the display hooks or prevent removal of items of merchandise while the display hook is locked. The invention also relates to a display hook that may be locked to the support structure to prevent the removal of the display hook from the support structure while also preventing the removal of merchandise from the hook or preventing the rapid removal of the merchandise from the hook.

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2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Items of merchandise are commonly displayed for sale on long protruding rods supported from a support structure in the nature of a peg board, a slat board, or a wire rack. These protruding rods are commonly referred to in the art as display hooks, peg board hooks, or slat board hooks. Similar rods may also protrude from a wire display rack for the same purpose. Usually, the items of merchandise are relatively small but expensive, such as batteries, small tools, cosmetic products, or health care products. Such merchandise is an easy target for shoplifters because they can rapidly remove all the items from a display hook and leave the store without being detected. Alternately, the shoplifter can remove the entire display hook with the merchandise and leave the store. Therefore, it is desired in the art to provide display hooks that prevent both the removal of the display hooks from the support structure, the rapid removal of items of merchandise from the display hooks, or a combination of both features.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In one embodiment, the invention provides a lockable display hook wherein a lock member interacts directly with the rod of the display hook without requiring notches or grooves to be formed in the rod of the display hook. The lock member prevents the display hook from being removed from its support structure until a key is used to move the lock member to an unlocked position.

In one embodiment, the invention provides a magnetically actuatable locking mechanism that interacts directly with the rod of the display hook.

A different embodiment of the invention provides an end assembly for the display hook that limits product sweeping wherein the entire contents of the display hook may not be swept rapidly from the display hook by a shoplifter.

In one embodiment, the invention provides an end assembly that limits product sweeping while allowing quick product loading.

In another embodiment, the invention provides an end assembly that accepts product identification and/or price tags.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a side elevation view of a first embodiment of the merchandise display hook of the present invention.

Fig. 2 is a rear elevation view of the base assembly.

Fig. 3 is a perspective view of the second lock member.

Fig. 4 is a side sectional view showing the base assembly in an unlocked position with the lock in the locked position.

Fig. 5 is a view similar to Fig. 4 showing the base assembly in the locked position.

Fig. 6 is a view similar to Fig. 5 showing the lock in the unlocked position.

Fig. 7 is a section view taken along line 7-7 of Fig. 6.

Fig. 8 is a view similar to Fig. 6 showing the base assembly moved to the unlocked position with the lock in the unlocked position.

Fig. 9 is a side elevation view similar to Fig. 1 of a second embodiment of the merchandise display hook of the present invention.

5 Fig. 10 is a section view of the base assembly of Fig. 9.

Fig. 11 is a side elevation view of a third embodiment of the merchandise display hook of the present invention.

Fig. 12 is a sectional side view of the end assembly shown in Fig. 11.

10 Fig. 13 is a view similar to Fig. 12 showing the end assembly moved to a loading position.

Fig. 14 is a section view of the end assembly in the anti-sweeping position with the lock unlocked.

Fig. 15 is a view similar to Fig. 14 with the lock unlocked and the end assembly moved to the loading position.

15 Fig. 16 is a side elevation view of a merchandise display hook having an alternative version of the end assembly wherein a product identification and/or price tag may be attached to the end assembly.

Fig. 17 is an exploded perspective view of the end assembly and tag.

Fig. 18 is a left side elevation view of the end assembly.

20 Fig. 19 is a top plan view of the end assembly.

Fig. 20 is a top plan view of the tag.

Fig. 21 is a rear elevation view of the tag.

Fig. 22 is a side elevation view of the tag.

Figs. 23-31 show the steps of connecting the tag with the end assembly wherein the tag is pivoted onto the cross bar.

Fig. 27 is a section view taken along line 27-27 of Fig. 26.

5 Fig. 29 is a section view taken along line 29-29 of Fig. 28.

Fig. 30 is an enlarged view of the encircled portion of Fig. 29.

Fig. 31 is a section view taken along line 31-31 of Fig. 29.

Similar numbers refer to similar parts throughout the specification.

10 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

One embodiment of the merchandise display hook of the present invention is indicated generally by the numeral 10 in the accompanying drawings. Another embodiment of the display hook of the invention is indicated generally by the numeral 100. Display hooks 10 and 100 are used with a support structure 12 to support items 14 of merchandise for display in a retail environment. Support structure 12 may be any of a variety of support structures used with display hooks 10 and 100 such as peg boards or slat boards, racks, shelves, and the like. Display hooks 10 and 100 are configured to be locked to support structure 12 so that a shoplifter may not simply remove the entire display hook 10 or 100 along with all of the merchandise carried by hook 10 or 100. Display hook 10 or 100 may also be configured to prevent sweeping which

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is a term of art used to describe a shoplifter's action of rapidly removing all of the merchandise displayed on a display hook with a quick sweeping action.

Display hook 10 generally includes a base assembly 20 that locks hook 10 to support structure 12, a rod assembly 22 that supports items 14, and optionally, an end assembly 24 configured to limit merchandise sweeping. Rod assembly 22 includes an inner end and an outer end with the inner end being disposed adjacent support structure 12 when hook 10 is installed. The outer end of rod assembly 22 is where items 14 are removed from hook 10. In two of the exemplary embodiments (Figs. 1 and 9), end assembly 24 is in the form of curved rod sections that slow the removal of items 14 from rod assembly 22. In this embodiment, end assembly 24 includes a curve or bend 32 that prevents sweeping by forcing the person removing item 14 to carefully manipulate item 14 around curve 32. End assembly 24 may also include an upwardly extending hook 34 that forces each item 14 to be turned more than 90 degrees from its display position in order to remove item 14. In another embodiment (Fig. 11), end assembly 24 is in the form of a body that resiliently engages the end of rod assembly 22. The Fig. 11 embodiment of end assembly 24 may be moved to a loading and unloading position when unlocked with a key.

In the embodiments of the invention depicted in the drawings and used to provide examples of the invention, rod assembly 22 also functions to connect hook 10 to support structure 12 with a pair of hooks 26. In other embodiments of the invention, hooks 26 may be separated from rod assembly 22. Hooks 26

may be provided in any of a variety of configurations as required by support structure 12.

Rod assembly 22 may be provided in a single rod configuration or a double rod configuration. When provided in a double rod configuration, rod assembly 22 includes an upper rod 28 and a lower rod 30 that each extend outwardly from support structure 12. Upper rod 28 cooperates with the lock of hook 10 or 100 to lock hook 10 or 100 to support structure 12. Upper rod 28 may be used to support end assembly 24 (Fig. 11) or may be used to support product information such as the identification of items 14 or the price of items 14 (element 29 in Fig. 9). Upper rod 28 may also be used to support items 14 as shown in Fig. 1. When provided, lower rod 30 carries items 14 and has a length adapted to allow rod 30 to hold a plurality of items 14. Rods 28 and 30 are typically fabricated from a metal material but may also be fabricated from a variety of other rigid materials such as any variety of suitable plastics.

Base assembly 20 selectively secures display hook 10 to display support structure 12 in a manner that prevents display hook 10 from being removed from support structure 12 without the use of a specific key 40. As used in this application, the term "locking" is different than a simple "latched" connection. A "latched" connection may be unlatched without the use of a special key while a "locked" connection requires a special key in order to limit the unlocking capability to those who possess a key. In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, key 40 includes a first magnet 42 or a plurality of magnets 42. In

another embodiment, key 40 may mechanically interact with the lock mechanism.

Base assembly 20 also includes a lock 44 that secures base assembly 20 directly to rod assembly 22. Lock 44 is pivotally carried by the body 46 of base assembly 20 in a manner that allows lock 44 to move between locked and unlocked positions. The unlocked position of lock 44 allows base assembly 20 to be slid back and forth along rod assembly 22 with the locked position of lock 44 holding the position of base assembly 20 with respect to rod assembly 22.

Lock 44 includes a first lock member 50 and a second lock member 52. Second lock member 52 is movable between locked and unlocked positions by using key 40 which may use magnetic force. The locked position of second lock member 52 holds the position of first lock member 50 while the unlocked position of second lock member 52 allows first lock member 50 to pivot with respect to body 46. Second lock member 52 may be in the form of a biased lock finger that extends from a lock frame 54 that supports second lock member 52 from body 46. The biased finger may be a thin, metallic finger that can be pivoted to an unlocked position with magnetic force. The lock finger may also be pivoted by mechanically pulling upwardly on the finger. Lock frame 54 may be pinched between an inner body member 60 and an outer body member 62 of body 46. Hook 10 may be configured to function without second lock member 52 when a holding force is not necessary to hold first lock member 50 in the locked position.

First lock member 50 includes first 64 and second 66 lock member legs that connect to each other at an angle that is greater than 45° and less than 135° . First lock member 50 is carried by rod assembly 22 and is movable between locked and unlocked positions. Pivot arms 68 extend from either side of first lock member 50 adjacent the location where lock member legs 64 and 66 join together. Body 46 engages arms 68 to force lock member 50 into the locked position when body 46 is pulled in a direction from the inner end of rod 28 toward the outer end of rod 28 without first unlocking lock 44. In one embodiment of the invention, pivot arms 68 extend into openings defined by body 46 and support first lock member 50 in a pivoting condition wherein first lock member 50 may pivot between locked and unlocked positions.

Second lock member leg 66 defines an opening 70 that is slightly larger than the exterior diameter of upper rod 28. Opening 70 allows second lock member leg 66 and thus base assembly 20 to slide along upper rod 28 when lock 44 is in the unlocked position. Opening 70 is sized to frictionally engage upper rod 28 when lock 44 is in the locked position to prevent base assembly 20 from moving in a direction from the inner end of rod 28 toward the outer end of rod 28. Leg 66 and opening 70 may be configured to allow base assembly 20 to move back towards the inner end of rod 28 without use of key 40.

Second lock member leg 66 is thin compared to the diameter of upper rod 28 (the thickness of leg 66 is less than half of the diameter) with opening 70 being slightly larger than the diameter of upper rod 28 so that locking teeth and

notches are not required to be formed in upper rod 28. The frictional and wedging engagement of second lock member leg 66 with upper rod 28 securely locks base assembly 20 in place without the need for such lock teeth or notches. Opening 70 may be generally oval-shaped or include a pair of semi-circular end portions connected by a straight portion. Each of the semi-circular end portions has a diameter slightly greater than the outer diameter of rod 28.

In operation, first lock member 50 is held in the locked position by second lock member 52. In order to unlock display hook 10, the user moves key 40 into the proper position causing second lock member 52 to pivot upwardly and out of engagement with first lock member 50. When key 40 is magnetic, the magnetic force of key 40 may also pull first lock member leg 64 upwardly causing second lock member leg 66 to pivot with respect to upper rod 28 such that opening 70 becomes aligned with rod 28 to allow base assembly 20 to slide with respect to upper rod 28.

As noted above, body 46 includes inner body member 60 and outer body member 62. In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, inner body member 60 is fabricated from a metal while outer body member 62 is fabricated from a plastic. Body members 60 and 62 cooperate to hold lock 44 in position as well as securely holding rod assembly 22 in position. As such, outer body member 62 includes a barrel 72 that frictionally or snugly engages upper rod 28. First lock member leg 64 is disposed above barrel 72 with second lock member leg 66 disposed behind barrel 72. The outer surface of inner body member 60

snugly engages the inner surface of outer body member 62 so that a tight fit is formed between the two members. Outer body member 62 defines an opening 76 adapted to receive a screw 78 that holds body members 60 and 62 together to trap lock 44 in place. Inner body member 60 provides strength and rigidity to base assembly 20 and prevents the destruction of base assembly 20 if a shoplifter were to grab the end of rod assembly 22 and twist, pull upwardly, sideways, or downwardly in an attempt to break base assembly 20.

As described above, end assembly 24 may include a body 110 designed to lock to upper rod 28 in an anti-sweeping position. This version of end assembly 24 is depicted in Figs. 11-15. A lock 44 similar to the lock described above is used to lock the position of body 110 with respect to upper rod 28. Lock 44 works in the same manner described above with respect to base assembly 20. When lock 44 is in locked position and end assembly 24 is in the anti-sweeping position shown in Figs. 11, 12, and 14, end assembly 24 includes a biased member 112 that surrounds the outer end of lower rod 30 to prevent items 14 from being swept from lower rod 30. In this embodiment, biased element 112 includes a cup 114 that receives the outer end of lower rod 30. A spring 116 is used to bias cup 114 in the anti-sweeping position. A customer may remove item 14 as depicted in Fig. 13 by pressing item 14 against cup 114 to compress spring 116. The user then lowers item 14 away from end assembly 24 and purchases item 14.

The outer end of upper rod 28 may be bent as indicated at numeral 120. Bend 120 functions as a stop for end assembly so that the user does not pull end assembly 24 off of upper rod 28 when moving end assembly 24 to the loading position depicted in Fig. 15. Bend 120 contacts body 110 to stop the movement of end assembly 24 before rod 28 passes entirely out of lock 44. The loading position of end assembly 24 depicted in Fig. 15 allows a clerk loading merchandise 14 onto lower rod 30 to quickly and easily load items 14 without forcing the clerk to load items 14 one at a time.

Bend 120 may also be used to prevent end assembly 24 from rotating with respect to upper rod 28. Portions of body 110 are disposed on either side of bend 120 to limit the rotation of body 110 with respect to rod 28.

An alternative end assembly 24 is shown in Figs. 16-31 wherein a merchandise identification or merchandise price tag 200 may be mounted to the outer end of end assembly 24 on a mount 202. Mount 202 includes a base bar 204 that extends outwardly from the outer end of end assembly 24. Mount 202 also includes a cross bar 206 that is connected to the outer end of base bar 204 and is disposed substantially perpendicular to base bar 204. Base bar 204 is connected to the center of cross bar 206 such that cross bar 206 extends equal distances from each side of base bar 204.

Base bar 204 and cross bar 206 are configured to interact with a pair of flanges 210 that project from the rear of tag 200 to hold tag 200 in place on end assembly 24. Flanges 210 cooperate to define a channel 212 sized to receive

cross bar 206. Flanges 210 may be sized to resiliently clamp against cross bar 206.

5 Ribs 214 project towards each other from flanges 210 to further close channel 212. The inner ends 216 of ribs 214 are grouped together to define an opening 218. Opening 218 is used to snap tag 200 onto support 202 as shown in Figs. 23-31. The ends of cross bar 206 may be rounded to help open flanges 210 and ribs 214 when cross bar 206 is being forced through opening 218 into channel 212. Once bar 206 is snapped into channel 212, the user slides tag 200 along bar 206 until base bar 204 snaps in between ends 216 as shown in
10 Figs. 26-29.

In the foregoing description, certain terms have been used for brevity, clearness, and understanding. No unnecessary limitations are to be implied therefrom beyond the requirement of the prior art because such terms are used for descriptive purposes and are intended to be broadly construed.

15 Moreover, the description and illustration of the invention is an example and the invention is not limited to the exact details shown or described.